

By Chairman Don Stapley, District 2, Maricopa County Board of Supervisors

Attorney General Terry Goddard and Governor Janet Napolitano sponsored the conference: "A Call to Action: Addressing the Meth Crisis in Arizona" in downtown Phoenix last month. Focused on prevention, treatment, criminal justice strategies, public policy, and community action, the event attracted over 700 individuals. I was honored to sit on the closing panel.

The conference closed with a three-hour public policy forum, where local and state policy makers heard participants' recommendations for solutions to the meth problem. Several speakers were former drug-users who had turned their lives around. These individuals are now reuniting with their children, working full time jobs, buying homes, and giving back to the community through prevention and treatment efforts. They are *proof* that change is possible. Their voices are crucial to our fight.

Our fight requires the efforts of many, as meth touches an astounding percentage of our community. The following statistics were presented at the conference:

- 31.2% of men and 42.8% of women arrested in Phoenix have meth in their blood.
- 30-35% of meth lab seizures are residences with children.
- 65% of Arizona child abuse/neglect cases involve meth.
- From 2000-2005, meth lab disposal costs exceeded \$4.1 million.
- Meth hospital admissions in Maricopa County increased 855% from 1990-2004. Yes, 855%.
- 70% of reporting Arizona counties say that robberies/burglaries have increased because of meth use.

Our communities are experiencing severe financial, social, and societal impacts. Yet, there are solutions. The publicized rumor that only 7% of meth users can actually recover is absolutely a *myth*; there *are* successful treatment programs. Many communities are exploring policy to restrict meth cooks' access to pseudoephedrine. In addition, understanding that many individuals in our jails are dual-diagnosed with substance abuse addiction and mental illness, Maricopa County is exploring treatment for these individuals in appropriate settings outside of the criminal justice system.

The Maricopa County Commission on Justice System Intervention for the Seriously Mentally Ill focuses on appropriate treatment and placement for the mentally ill. The Commission is discussing improving communication between the County Criminal Justice System and treatment providers, and supports the Consolidated Mental Health Court. The Commission is currently exploring two specific programs:

- Mobile crisis teams modeled after the System-wide Mental Assessment Response Team (SMART) Program in Los Angeles pair clinicians and law enforcement officers. The goal is to prevent unnecessary incarceration and hospitalization of mentally ill individuals and allow for greater information exchange whereby the clinician can access medical records.
- An ALPHA II Program is being modeled after the original ALPHA Program currently provided to sentenced inmates by the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office. ALPHA is nationally recognized as one of the most effective in-custody substance use treatment programs today. ALPHA II will treat inmates with mental illness, serving an estimated additional 240 individuals per year.

Maricopa County is committed to collaborating with other partners to address these issues with broad responses that treat whole individuals. I welcome feedback from the community, and look forward to working together to alleviate this crisis.